

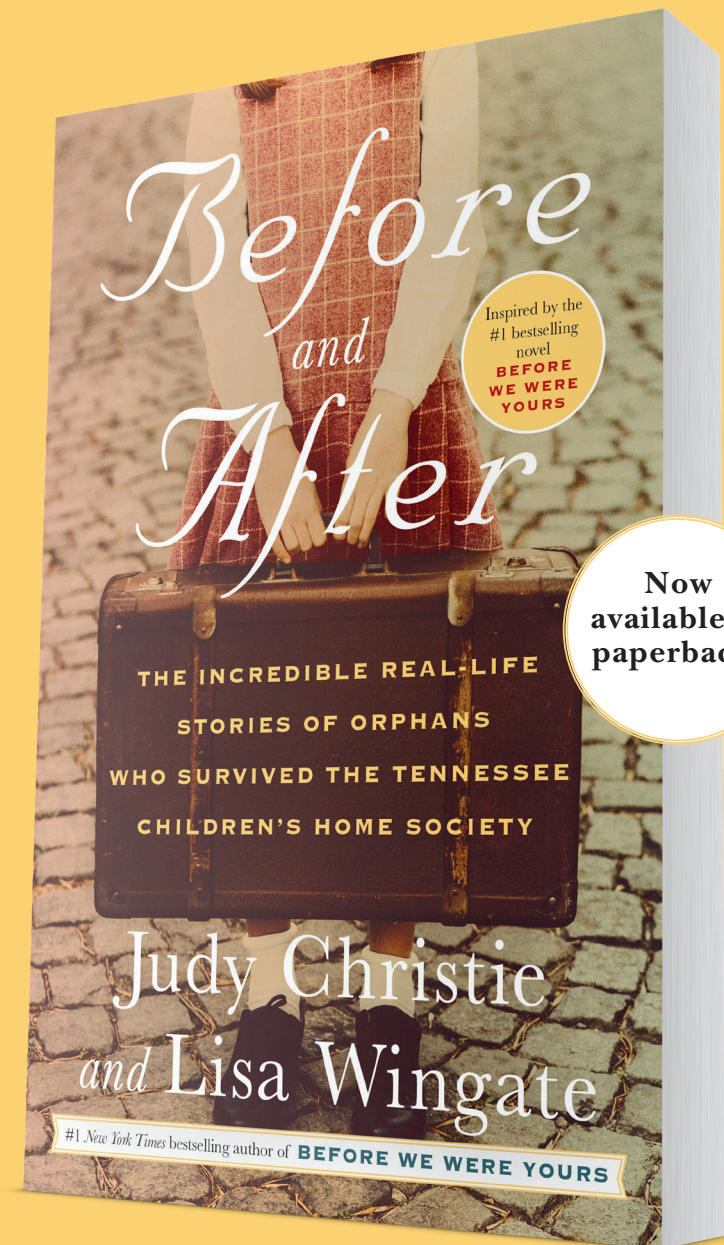
BOOK CLUB KIT

Before and After

Judy Christie
and Lisa Wingate



Inspired by the
#1 *New York Times* bestselling novel,
BEFORE WE WERE YOURS



JudyChristie.com [f](#) [t](#) [@](#) LisaWingate.com [f](#) [t](#) [@](#)

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR, JUDY CHRISTIE

Dear Reader:

Each of us has a story.

That's a lesson I learned way back in sixth grade in Louisiana as editor of my elementary school newspaper, *The Barret Banner*. And a truth I've confirmed throughout scores of newspaper interviews, decades as a writer, and a lifetime of encounters with interesting folks.

Preserving those stories, however, is not always easy. It requires connecting with individuals who are willing to share their stories; asking the right questions; listening to what is said—and what goes unsaid; observing details; and diving into background research. Lots of conversations and research went into *Before and After*. As one of the adoptees told me after reading his story, “I was surprised to see how much you listened.”

And what an honor it was to listen to adoptees and their family members. In some ways, it feels as though my entire life as a reporter, editor, and book author has been leading me to tell the stories of these fine people.

My first interviews started, as mentioned, in a grade-school newspaper with a story on a new library. I can still remember how the library smelled, how the new set of Childcraft encyclopedias felt as I thumbed through their crisp pages for the first time. Thus started decades of storytelling, stories undertaken as a longtime newspaper reporter and editor, novelist, and frequent speaker to groups large and small. I have had the privilege of interviewing everyday folks and presidents and first ladies, businesspeople, and athletes.

The power of stories, Lisa Wingate and I believe, changes lives, inspires us, helps us better understand our world and ourselves.

Not one of the stories I've undertaken has been more meaningful to me than the opportunity to tell the true stories of the resilient and hopeful people in *Before and After: The Incredible Real-Life Stories of Orphans Who Survived the Tennessee Children's Home Society*.

The tale of how this book came together is an extraordinary and unique publishing story. A #1 *New York Times* bestselling novel gave birth to a nonfiction sequel, a truly unusual turn of events. Lisa and I, writer friends for more than a decade, shared a dream to tell these important stories and save a piece of history—and we did it all on a wing and a prayer, investing months of hard work to see if somehow this might come together as a book. We took a leap of faith, investing lots of time and energy because we wanted these stories saved. Thought they had to be saved.

When Lisa wrote *Before We Were Yours*, the novel that has sold two million copies since it was released in 2017, I read an early copy and told everyone who would listen that it was one of the best books I'd ever read—in part because it was inspired by a piece of little-known and gripping Southern history and Lisa had written such a compelling, well-researched fictionalized account. What a story!

But who could have imagined that a novel could lead to helping people find their family members, bring adoptees together to heal broken places, and help many explore their family histories? I hope you enjoy *Before and After* as much as I enjoyed writing it.

—Judy Christie

Q&A WITH JUDY CHRISTIE

Q. We have to ask: Was it hard to write a book about such emotional, personal stories?

A. These stores have sad moments, but they are full of inspiration. This might sound corny, but it was an honor to tell such uplifting stories. They show the resilience and tenacity of the human spirit. They show what can happen if you don't give up. They remind us of the importance of friends and family.

Q. How did the novel *Before We Were Yours* lead to this nonfiction book?

A. This development was incredible and continues to move both Lisa Wingate and me. Real-life people read a novel and saw hints of their true story in it. They contacted Lisa with questions and documents. "This is my story," they said of the fictional version. That led to a nonfiction sequel, which we never expected and cannot recall happening before.

Q. How did you choose the adoptees to include in the book?

A. Lisa and I very much wanted to preserve as many stories as possible. But we wanted to include those who were ready to tell their stories and who wanted or needed to make sure their story was preserved for history. We followed up with folks who connected with Lisa after reading *Before We Were Yours*. We also connected with some people who were mentioned to us by other adoptees. But we did not include

anyone who was not comfortable telling their story or who felt as though it should be kept within their family.

Q. Have you worked with a co-author before? How did you and Lisa work together?

A. Lisa and I each typically write alone, but we are good friends and have discussed writing projects with each other for years. Our regular routine is to talk on the phone at lunch about once a month or so, brainstorming our respective projects. In so many ways, the *Before and After* journey seems almost magical. We had planned to visit in Colorado the summer of the reunion, so we were able to plan the book together, with lots of discussions about these remarkable people. We used lots of sticky notes and poster boards to figure out how best to tell these stories.

Q. How did writing this book affect you?

A. Oh my! In ways I did not anticipate. First, I was emotionally moved by these stories. My heart hurt many days when I was writing. And I thought much about my own family, my three brothers, my DNA, how my hair is graying at the temples like my mother's did. And I was so eager to tell these stories. The sources were aging, and some had health setbacks in the months after I met them. I wanted to make sure their stories were told while they could still celebrate their lives.

Q&A WITH JUDY CHRISTIE

Q. Have you met other adoptees since you wrote the book?

A. Absolutely. Some come to Lisa's talks about *Before We Were Yours*. Others email us. I'm interviewing as many of these folks as I can, so we can save their stories too, in one way or another. One of the terrific developments has been that adoptees are sharing their stories to book clubs and also helping other adoptees find their adoption documentation. We also plan to get together again in Memphis.

Q. Do you stay in touch with the people in the book?

A. Yes! We email and chat on the phone regularly. We meet for lunch when we happen to be in the same city. I count them as dear friends, and I hope they feel the same way. They have generously shared the most personal details of their lives, and this has built friendships I could never have dreamed of.

Q. This book seemed to come together quickly. How did that work for you and Lisa?

A. What a wild and meaningful ride! We owe agent Elisabeth Weed and Penguin Random House many thanks for the way they handled our manuscript and got the book out in just over a year. It's hard to believe that we didn't even know if we had a book, and it miraculously came together. There were many late nights of writing, reminiscent of college exam days, but we wanted *Before and After* to come out while these adoptees are healthy and able to celebrate their stories. We texted zillions of times a day and had

occasional lengthy phone conversations. I visited Lisa at her home, and she came to mine so we could plot and plan and make sure we were not missing any details. And, of course, we shared many drafts of the manuscript back and forth.

Q. Any final thoughts?

A. I love the people I interviewed for this project and plan to stay in touch with them for the rest of our lives. They're special and inspire me with how they've chosen to live their lives. What a blessing to know them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The authors loved getting to know these adoptees and their families. What particular characteristics about these people struck you as you read the stories?
2. Ideas about adoption have changed through the years. How did secrets about adoption affect these “Georgia Tann babies”? Would the situation be different today? What did you learn about adoption from this book?
3. A question often asked is, “Why did no one stop this?” Why do you think this horror continued for so many years? Could something like this happen again?
4. The novel *Before We Were Yours*, a fictional story, brought real-life people forward to talk about their stories. Why do you think a novel affected the adoptees so?
5. Do you think most people have hidden stories that they need or want to tell? Are there secrets in your family?
6. What might an individual do to help children who are in harm’s way? Do you think you would have spoken up during the Tann era?
7. Each of the adoptees was given a name at birth and then a new name. How did you get your name?
8. Reading fiction and nonfiction can be a different experience. What are some of the differences in genres? Do you prefer fiction or nonfiction? Why?
9. The adoptees and family members bravely told their stories. Why do you think this was important to them? Would you be willing to tell your personal story?
10. What historical events affected the adoptions of those in *Before and After*?
11. Going back to Memphis was a moving experience for the adoptees and their families. Have you ever driven by the house where you grew up or visited a cemetery where a family member is buried? Why do people need to make such pilgrimages?
12. Is there someone in your family whose story needs to be preserved? How might you do that?

PHOTOS FROM BEHIND THE SCENES OF *BEFORE AND AFTER*

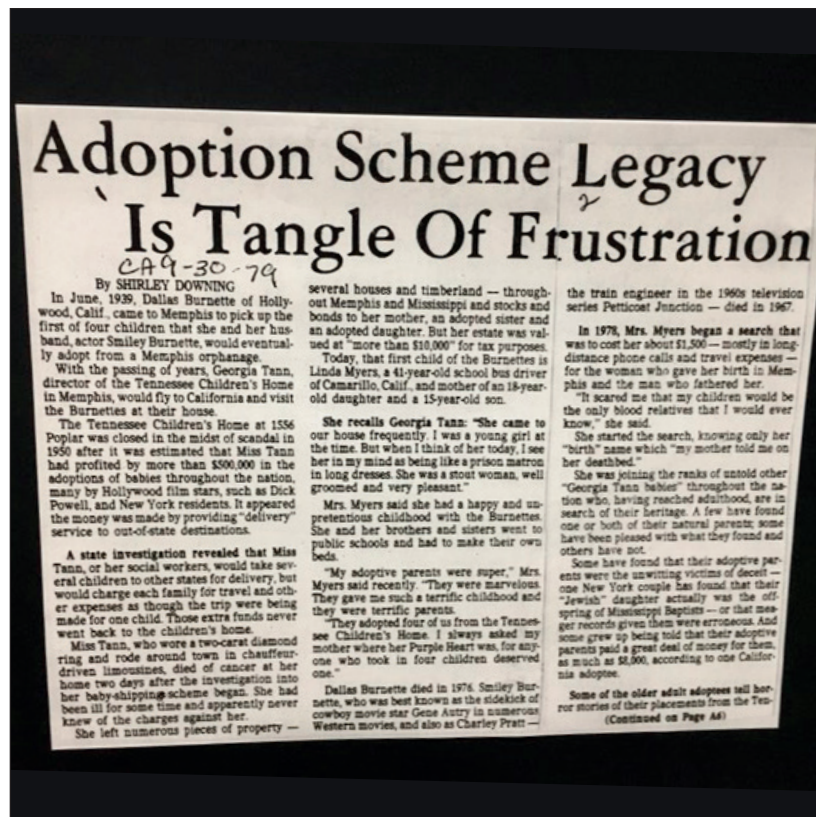


1. Father and daughter celebrate reading their story in *Before and After*. He was adopted, and she wanted to know about his birth family. She is holding his adoption document portfolio, which his mother had kept.

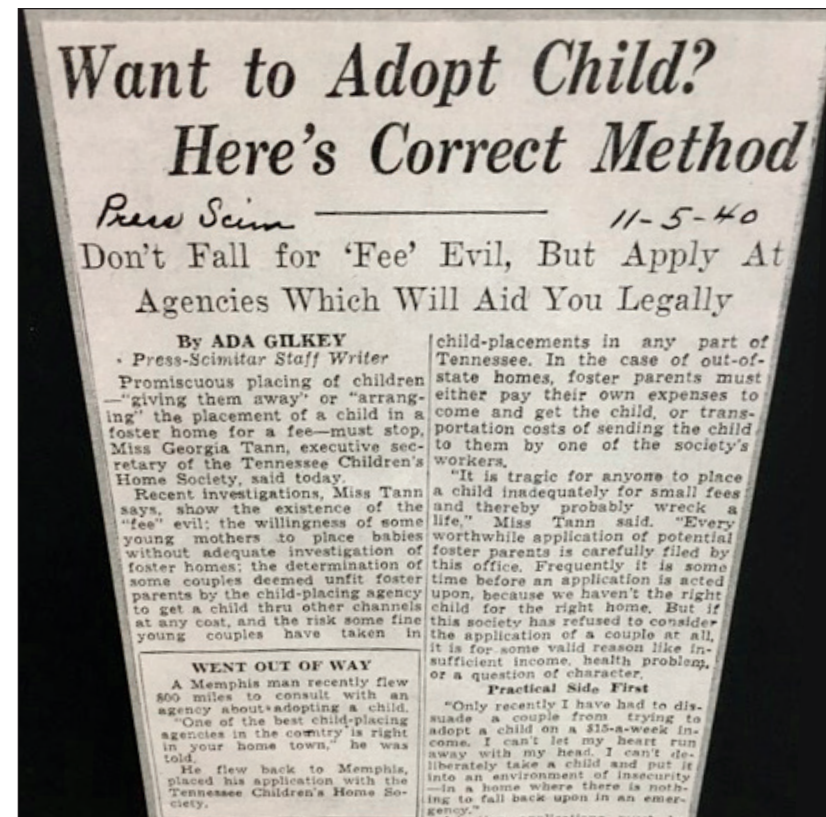


2. A collection of Tennessee Children's Home Society materials are available in the Memphis Public Library and at the University of Memphis.

PHOTOS FROM BEHIND THE SCENES OF BEFORE AND AFTER

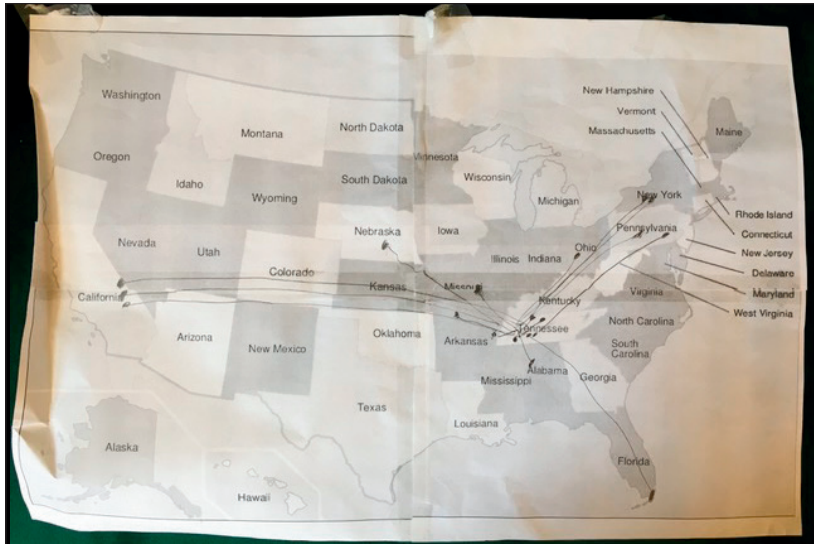


3. Memphis and Nashville newspaper articles reported on the scandal years after it first broke.

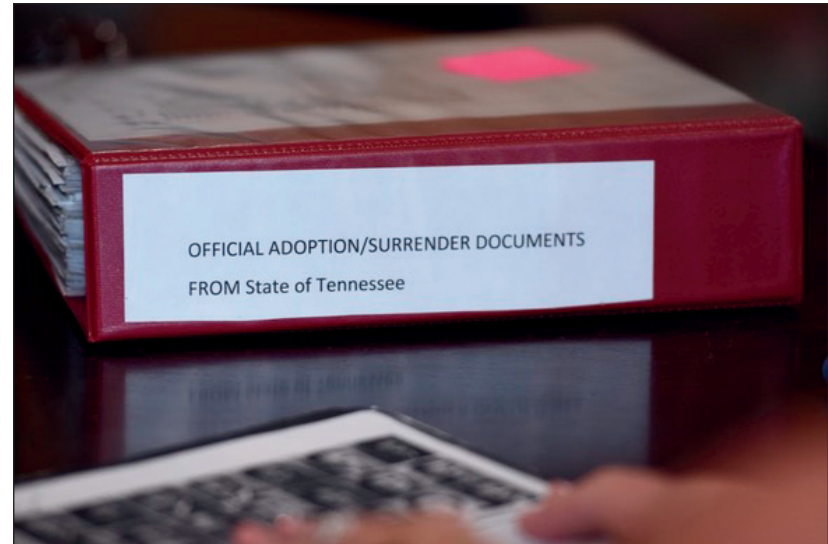


4. In an evil twist, Georgia Tann promoted her orphanage as the correct way to adopt a child in this 1940 newspaper article in Memphis.

PHOTOS FROM BEHIND THE SCENES OF *BEFORE AND AFTER*



5. Authors' homemade map, posted in Judy's office, tracks where adoptees were sent by Georgia Tann.



6. Research for *Before and After* included going through thousands of pages of documents and old newspapers.

PHOTOS FROM BEHIND THE SCENES OF *BEFORE AND AFTER*



7. The authors met in Judy's office to piece together the plans for the book. This poster board shows how the stories came together.



8. Judy and Lisa go over documents at Judy's desk in Colorado.

MUSIC PLAYLIST

My approach to writing this book was different from others I'd written, not only from doing a project with Lisa, but to how I set up my daily writing routine. These stories felt holy to me, and I settled into a writing routine that reflected that. I lit a candle on my desk each morning and turned on music—gravitating to a wonderful classical playlist. I realized, though, I also wanted music that meant something to those I was writing about.

After asking adoptees and their families for their favorite music, I enlisted my husband to put together this playlist. As I wrote, I felt as though I was visiting with these adoptees and their families and often had a tear in my eye. Some of the songs were uplifting, others reflective. Some were downright sad. I will never hear these songs without thinking of these special people.

And, I asked Lisa to give me her favorite song for the mix. When I listened, it was as though we were working in the same room—even if we were in different states.

—Judy Christie

BEFORE AND AFTER PLAYLIST

- “We Are Family”
Sister Sledge
- “I Lived It”
Blake Shelton
- “Just When I Needed You Most”
Randy VanWarmer
- “Most People Are Good”
Luke Bryan
- “Hallelujah (instrumental)”
Gypsy Flamenco Masters
- “I Can Only Imagine”
MercyMe
- “Will The Circle Be Unbroken”
Nitty Gritty Dirt Band
- “Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain”
Willie Nelson

Lisa's Favorite Song

- “Wildfire”
Michael Martin Murphey